In Rabī’ I 66/October 686, Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī led a revolt against the Umayyads to avenge the “blood of [the Prophet’s] family” in the name of the prominent ‘Alid, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya. The uprising was crushed in Ramaḍān 67/April 687 by an army composed of the Kūfan tribal elite (ashrāf) and Meccan supporters of ‘Abdallāh b. Zubayr. The rebels who survived the defeat and maintained their belief in the imāmate of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya were subsequently known as the Kaysānīyya. After Mukhtār’s death in 84/703, the Kaysānīs split into several factions, including a “small but well organized” group that confirmed the Imāmate of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya’s eldest son, Abū Ḥāshim. In time, a close friendship developed between the prominent (and childless) ‘Alid and his cousin ‘Alī b. ‘Abdallāh b. al-ʿAbbās (d. 117/735). Some historians even reported that Abū Ḥāshim moved the entire ‘Hanafiyya branch of the ‘Alid family to the ‘Abbāsid estate in al-Ḥumayma by 91/710. Abū Ḥāshim died in 98/716–7, either in al-Ḥumayma or between al-Ḥumayma and Damascus. The next three decades witnessed successive ‘Alid revolts and a period of clandestine propaganda (daʿwa) in Khurāsān, culminating in Shawwāl 129/June 747 when Abū Muslim unfurled black banners and declared open rebellion against the Umayyads. In Jumādā II 130/ February 748, he decisively defeated the Umayyad governor

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2 al-Qāḍī (al-Kaysānīyya fi l-ta’rikh wa-l-adab) discusses the origins of the name “Kaysānīyya” and identifies the Ḥāshimiyya as its largest constituent group after the death of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya. See also EI2 art. “Kaysānīyya” (W. Madelung).
3 Sharon, *Black Banners*, 109, 125. Several studies of the ‘Abbāsid daʿwa have discussed the origin of the name “Ḥāshimiyya.” Some have argued that it derives from Abū Ḥāshim, while others maintain that it dates back to Ḥāshim, the ancestor of the ‘Alid and ‘Abbāsid branches of Quraysh. See Madelung, “The Ḥāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt.”
4 The branch of the ‘Alid family descended from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya.
of Khurāsān, Naṣr b. Sayyār, effectively establishing a new dynastic power. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbdallāh b. al-ʿAbbās was proclaimed the first ʿAbbāsid caliph in Kūfa in 132/750.

Most modern historians affirm the historicity of this timeline and focus instead on identifying (a) the primary causes of the revolution and (b) the process whereby the ʿAbbāsids consolidated their power. Why did the revolution erupt when and where it did? Why were the ʿAbbāsids able to succeed where the ʿAlids had met with repeated disasters and failures? How did the ʿAbbāsids frame their argument for political legitimacy vis-à-vis their ʿAlid cousins? On the surface, the answers to many of these questions appear within the textual tradition itself in the form of public speeches, portents, or covert communications. Reliance on these texts for historical information, however, is complicated by (a) their unreliable dating and (b) their highly literary nature. It is the second of these factors that has played an especially important role in several recent studies on the early Islamic period.

Jacob Lassner’s literary approach to ʿAbbāsid historiography has particular importance in the context of this study. Specifically, Lassner argues for the primacy of ideological debates and political propaganda in the authorship of ʿAbbāsid historical narratives. ʿAbbāsid history was written by apologists in a dynamic process that required the reader’s direct participation. Propagandists “wove strands of historical fact

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6 To some extent, all historical chronicles are literary documents shaped by the historian’s prejudice as well as the mores and norms of society at large. In the case of the sources for early Islam (i.e., the first two centuries), such influences are pervasive and often difficult to navigate, with some modern scholars going so far as to argue that these influences reshaped (or even dictated) the historical narrative. The debate over the accuracy of this claim is beyond the scope of this paper, which is more interested in finding approaches that bypass these textual controversies altogether.


8 Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*. Lassner does not make clear whom he means by “the reader.” His argument centers upon a “reader” who can see through implicit references within a narrative account, interpreting them in a manner consistent with the propagandist’s polemical intent. However, the general population was not capable of interpreting historical accounts in this way. If Lassner’s thesis about propaganda and interpretation is correct, it is much more probable that the process occurred only in literate elite circles. Moreover, it is by no means clear how susceptible these elite groups were to manipulation and propaganda of the type that Lassner describes. It is likely that the narratives played substantially varied roles for different segments of society.